

2011 Montana Legislature
Testimony in Opposition to HB 537
March 10, 2011

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EXHIBIT 6
DATE 3/10/11
HB 537

A BILL FOR AN ACT ENTITLED: "AN ACT REVISING LAWS RELATED TO NONRESIDENT HUNTING LICENSES; AUTHORIZING THE SALE OF OUTFITTER-SPONSORED LICENSES; REVISING FEES FOR CERTAIN NONRESIDENT HUNTING LICENSES AND REVISING THE DISPOSITION OF THOSE FEES; AMENDING SECTIONS 87-1-242, 87-1-266, 87-1-601, 87-2-202, 87-2-505, 87-2-510, 87-2-511, AND 87-2-512, MCA; REPEALING SECTION 87-1-290, MCA; AND PROVIDING A DELAYED EFFECTIVE DATE."

HB 537 is an effort to overturn the citizen initiative that ended the privileged allocation of hunting opportunity to clients of outfitters. I respectfully plead that you vote NO on this legislation for a number of reasons.

First, the ballot issue brought by Montana hunters was specifically designed to end granting privileged access to hunting licenses to commercial interests who were basically privatizing a public resource. The fact that Montana hunters took this action, and the people of Montana responded favorably to it, should be sufficient testimony that HB 537 is nothing more than special interest political manipulation to suppress the will of the people. In words more fitting to today's political jargon, it is politically forcing the government to impose itself contrary to the will of the people.

Second, the public trust responsibility the state holds in wildlife conservation and management has resulted in the most successful wildlife restoration effort in human history. It was all driven by an uncomplicated set of principles, that basically held, that if we all conserved we would all share the benefits. HB 537 would head us back into old aristocratic hunting models where history has taught us wildlife is lost and hunters are vilified.¹

Third, there are places right here in the good old USA where states have been reckless with their public trust responsibilities in wildlife allocation and management. In the one formal study of the subject that I am aware of, author Valerius Geist observed that: "*Texas has but half the deer hunters of Wisconsin, yet almost five times the number of deer and three times the human population; Paid hunting reduces participation rates, the most important factor supporting our system of wildlife conservation.*"² HB537 is nothing but the importation of the Texas model of wildlife management into Montana and imposing it upon Montana hunters clearly against the will of Montana hunters and the voters that supported preserving Montana's democracy of the wild.

Vote NO on HB 537.

¹ In England the Aurochs, bear, beaver, wolf, boar, and reindeer went extinct. Oscar Wilde described fox hunting as: *The unspeakable in pursuit of the inedible*, and hunting has been attacked as a residual of the hated aristocracy.

² Valerius Geist, *How Markets in Wildlife Meat and Parts, and the Sale of Hunting Privileges Jeopardize Wildlife Conservation*. Conservation Biology, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1988.